

Normalization of Experiences Following Deployment

Agenda

- Purpose
- Terminal & Enabling Learning Objectives
- Introduction
- Common Reactions
- Flashbacks
- Coping Mechanisms
- When Normal Reactions Become Problematic
- Referral Sources for More Serious Issues

Purpose

- To provide an understanding of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are common to most service members after redeployment.
- To instruct on the process to determine whether or not post-deployment experiences are within the normal range or require further attention from a medical provider.

Introduction

- Changing roles and environments
- Normal reactions to abnormal experiences
- Most soldiers will experience one or more of the reactions that we will discuss
- These normal reactions may feel uncomfortable but, in most cases, are not a cause for concern
- Typically, the “common reactions” stop after 6 – 8 weeks

Terminal Learning Objective

- Participants will understand the “normal” experiences common after a deployment and identify when additional services are required to address post-deployment experiences.

Enabling Learning Objectives

- A. Participants will identify a minimum of 4 reactions common during redeployment and reunion.
- B. Participants will be able to identify a minimum of 3 positive (helpful) and 3 negative (not helpful) coping strategies that soldier's can use to deal with the normal consequences of redeployment.

Enabling Learning Objectives

- C. Participants will be able to identify the relationship between functional impairment and the need for more specialized assistance in coping with the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors following a deployment episode.
- D. Participants will be able to identify a minimum of 2 avenues available to them to seek additional care if needed.

Common Interpersonal Reactions

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Frustration
- Irritability
- Depression
- Guilt
- Feeling emotionally numb (often described as “I just don’t feel much of anything anymore”)
- Concentration problems
- Memory problems
- Crying spells
- Loss of trust
- Loss of interest/motivation
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbance
 - Oversleeping
 - trouble falling asleep
 - waking up in the middle of the night)
- Feeling jumpy
- Flashbacks

Interpersonal Reactions (cont)

- Difficulty talking about deployment experiences
- Difficulty readjusting to family routines
- Difficulty reconnecting with children and spouse
- Discomfort being around other people

Flashbacks

- Flashbacks are episodes of re-experiencing the events that occurred during a deployment
- During a flashback episode, soldiers feel as if they are “back in the Gulf” and are may not be aware of their immediate surroundings
- Although disconcerting and uncomfortable, flashbacks are generally normal and not associated with a more serious problem *UNLESS* they persist for several months or cause significant interference in a soldier’s ability to function normally

Flashbacks (Cont)

- Flashbacks may occur in response to a “trigger” (e.g., a loud noise that sounds like a weapons discharge) or spontaneously without a “trigger”
- Soldiers can cope with flashbacks by reminding themselves that flashbacks are to be expected
- Soldiers can cope with flashbacks by discussing them with family, friends, supervisors
- Soldiers can cope with flashbacks by seeking professional assistance if they are concerned about these experiences

Positive (+) Coping

- Take time to Rest and Relax
- Spend time with family and friends (when ready)
- Get together with buddies to discuss deployment
- Resume a hobby that was not available during the deployment
- Working around the house
- Take leave
- Reconnect with friends and family who live elsewhere

Negative (-) Coping

- Drinking alcohol excessively
- Taking illegal drugs
- Going on a spending spree
- Gambling
- Picking fights
- Driving recklessly
- Excessive risk taking behaviors
- Isolating yourself for long periods

When Normal Reactions Become

- Functional impairment: anything that significantly interferes with a soldier's ability to do the things that he or she needs to do in any important area of life (work, home, family, social, spiritual)
- Constant oversleeping is a common reaction to deployment that can become a functional impairment
- Functional impairment is the clearest sign that a normal reaction to deployment may be turning into a more serious problem

When Normal Reactions Become

- If normal reactions persist longer than 6 – 8 weeks **AND** continue to cause the soldier distress, it may be a sign that normal reactions to deployment may be turning into a more serious problem
- However, there is **no set time line** for normal reactions to resolve; in some soldiers 6 – 8 weeks is sufficient, others may need more or less time

Referral Sources for More Serious

- Chain of command
- Chaplain
- Unit or hospital behavioral health officer
- Unit sick call
- Veterans Administration

Conclusion

What was addressed

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QUESTIONS?